

Changes at NOAA's National Ocean Service: Meeting the Challenges of the 21st Century

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This document is the debut of a periodic series to help initiate and support a national dialogue on Coastal Stewardship. It describes a series of changes occurring at NOAA's National Ocean Service (NOS) to help position NOAA to meet the challenges of Coastal Stewardship in the 21st Century while ensuring sustainable use, economic prosperity, and environmental well-being in our Nation's coastal areas.

What is Coastal Stewardship ?

Coastal Stewardship is providing leadership to advance the sustainable use of our coastal systems to support the Nation's economic prosperity and environmental well-being. Leadership requires NOAA to integrate its own capabilities with those of the extramural community, provide technological and expert assistance to partners, and help others to achieve success in their coastal stewardship responsibilities.

Need for Coastal Stewardship

Our Nation's coastal areas are experiencing rapid population growth and development, and increasing demands are being placed on coastal resources. These coastal areas are experiencing chronic problems. For instance, the populations of virtually all estuarine inshore species of fish have been reduced to historically low levels of abundance; over a third of the Nation's original salt marshes and mangrove forests have been destroyed; and relatively high concentrations of toxics have been found in sediments and animals near urban areas.

Increased National Coastal Concerns

- Congress has proposed new legislation (The Oceans Act of 1997) to revamp Federal efforts to protect, explore and utilize ocean and coastal resources. The measure will establish a Presidential Commission and calls for the development and implementation of a coordinated national ocean and coastal policy.
- The recent *pfisteria* outbreak in the Chesapeake Bay tributaries is only one dramatic example of a growing national problem – harmful algal blooms. The magnitude of fish kills and the human health implications of these events have triggered a multi-state and Federal agency response, and a strong argument for more comprehensive and coordinated coastal research and management efforts.

A new and more focused approach – Coastal Stewardship – is needed to bridge the gap between science, management and public policy. Bridges and partnerships must be forged by integrating, coordinating, and empowering all coastal stewards, including Federal, state, and local governments, as well as the private sectors.

Scope of Coastal Stewardship

To be successful, a Coastal Stewardship ethic must be embraced by individuals and institutions in all sectors of society. Coastal Stewards

include public, private, not-for-profit, academic, and stakeholder institutions and individuals in the Nation's coastal community, which extends from the interior boundary of coastal watersheds out across the continental shelf and also includes the Great Lakes. Coastal Stewardship requires us to act locally, regionally, and nationally in response to problems, issues and concerns. At the same time, it requires us to think globally, recognizing that we are part of an international community, and that the problems we face transcend political boundaries.

Redefining the Mission of NOS

Often, our response to these problems is most often not coordinated at the national and international levels. Governments, individuals, and corporations often take unilateral action. This is due, in part, to a plethora of laws and regulations with sometimes conflicting purposes. What little coordination does occur is often piecemeal in nature.

Given that no single agency has sole responsibility for coastal stewardship, and because of continued, unprecedented coastal problems, Dr. Baker established the Coastal Stewardship Task Force in 1994 to recommend how NOAA's effectiveness in this area could be improved. On May 29, 1997, Dr. Baker announced that he had accepted the Task Force recommendations and appointed Dr. Nancy Foster to implement them as Assistant Administrator for Ocean Services and Coastal Zone Management.



He tasked her and NOS with implementing the Task Force recommendations to :

1. Create a Federal interagency coastal council to be led by NOAA. (Senator Ernest Hollings (SC), with support from other Senators, including Senator Ted Stevens (AK), introduced legislation – The Oceans Act of 1997 – that establishes an Interagency Council and Commission to reevaluate our National ocean and coastal policies);
2. Promote understanding and coordination of NOAA coastal programs and regional perspectives;
3. Produce a “State of the Coast Report”;
4. Enhance research support for NOAA management decisions; and
5. Make organizational changes within NOS to strengthen coastal stewardship, enhance research support for NOAA coastal management, and build better linkages among NOAA’s coastal programs (this includes building a science foundation, and strengthening the links between our coastal science efforts and coastal management responsibilities).

NOS contains one of the greatest concentrations of comprehensive coastal expertise in the Nation. This diversity is unique and provides NOS with a great strength that enables the organization to fulfill its significant coastal authorities and responsibilities, and build upon existing partnerships within the coastal community.

Organization. Figure 1 shows a new organizational structure to provide an improved foundation for carrying out these new responsibilities. Focused on four thematic areas (science, response, management and navigation), the structure provides for the formation of teams that will integrate expertise across themes to meet specific needs. The structure is also designed to provide a regional focus where necessary. NOS will initiate or increase its emphasis in several important areas.

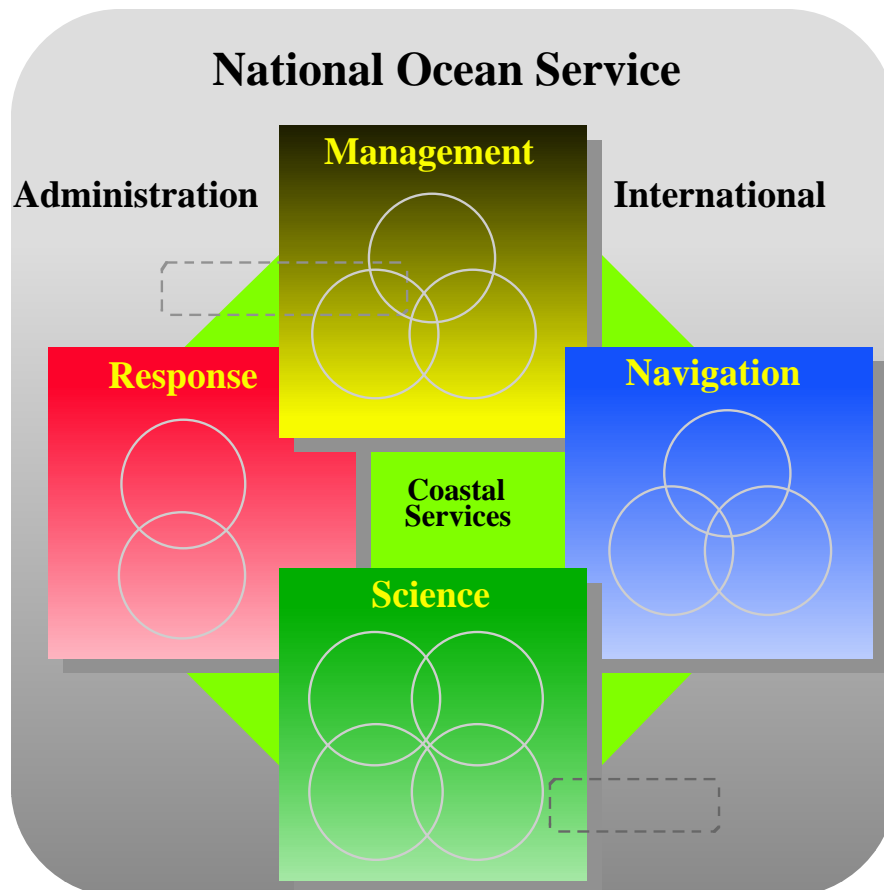
See “How NOAA’s National Ocean Service Will Evolve” for a further explanation of the changes planned for NOS.

National Dialogue. NOS plans to begin to position NOAA, in cooperation with its fellow stewards, to explore the critical issues affecting the wise stewardship of our Nation’s coastal resources. Because of new communication technologies such as the internet, there is now an unprecedented opportunity to gather and synthesize ideas and opinions on the critical national issues affecting coastal stewardship from a broader audience of stakeholders. This dialogue will form the basis for an integrated approach to address issues affecting our coastal environment. Plans also call for this approach to lead to a National symposium to establish the Coastal Stewardship agenda for the 21st Century.

Legislation. NOS will actively begin the process of identifying, reviewing, and analyzing all relevant existing legislative authorities to determine whether they facilitate or hinder Coastal Stewardship. This will allow us to identify a national legislative agenda.

Science. NOS clearly understands that a responsible coastal steward must base its actions on a strong

Figure 1. The new National Ocean Service Framework



understanding of coastal systems. This means that good science must form the basis and foundation of our actions. NOS has committed to further develop its science capabilities, and to form new and strengthen existing partnerships both within and outside of NOAA, particularly with the academic community.

Regional Emphasis on Delivery of Products and Services. A process has been initiated that brings together the expertise and knowledge of scientists, resource managers, and other interest groups to resolve problems at or near their source.

Partnerships. NOS will increase work with its fellow stewards in addressing issues relevant to our coastal environment. Coastal Stewardship partnerships will be all-encompassing, to include local, regional, and national governments, and the public and private sectors. These active partnerships will not only address issues relevant to today, but will form the basis for setting the national agenda for the 21st Century.

International. Coastal Stewardship is “transboundary.” We as stewards have learned that actions taken in one part of our world can, and do, affect other parts of the globe, whether “transport” occurs by air or water. Therefore, as we set a national agenda for the future, it is our responsibility to share that message internationally and further nurture our partnerships abroad.

Toward an Integrated NOS Stewardship Team

Leading a new commitment to coastal stewardship will require NOS to make dramatic changes, individually and corporately, in how we think, act and conduct business. If a leadership role in

coastal stewardship is to be assured and accepted, our core value systems will need to reflect roles such as: communicator, enabler, mediator, catalyst, facilitator, expert, supporter, collaborator, integrater, promoter, provider.

To accomplish changes within NOS, a systematic, phased approach to change must occur. Success depends on establishing an open, participatory process of evolution, with clear and regular communication within NOS and NOAA.

Successful transition requires a well planned and carefully executed process that minimizes disruption. Instead of abrupt change, we must recognize and build on existing strengths, and capitalize on the natural connections between programs and projects. Many of our basic missions will not change since they already support the overall mission of improving coastal stewardship.

Our goal is to ensure that the Coastal Stewardship ethic is embraced by individuals and institutions in all sectors of society, particularly those residing in coastal areas.

The Coastal Stewardship Forum will be periodic. Vol. 2 will focus on The Oceans Act of 1997.

The NOS Coastal Stewardship Web Site – Redefining NOS for the 21st Century – contains various materials, including the Coastal Stewardship Task Force recommendations, results of Employee Input Sessions, Transition Team progress reports, a “Dialogue Room” for questions and answers, and information on the the Coastal Stewardship essay contest. The web site provides a new way for reporting and listening within NOS and NOAA.

The address for the Web Site is:
<http://newnos.nos.noaa.gov/newnos>

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